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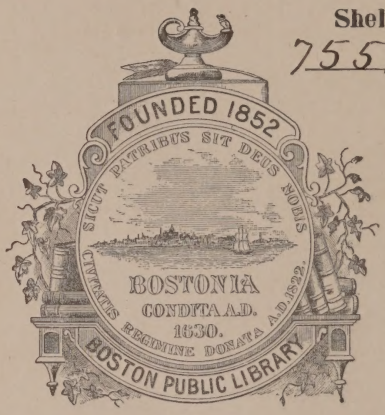

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Rev^d John Pierpont
with Christian regards of his friend
S. T. Sawyer
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A

LETTER

TO THE

SO-CALLED "BOSTON CHURCHES,"

7551.114

WHICH ARE IN TRUTH ONLY PARTS OF

ONE CHURCH.

BY A MEMBER OF THE SAME.

BOSTON:
WM. CROSBY AND H. P. NICHOLS,
118 Washington Street.
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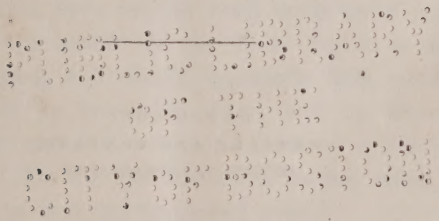

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LETTER.

BRETHREN,

ALL Christians are members of one body, that is the Church, which is the body of Christ; and do by necessity love one another, inasmuch as they are members; and cannot cease to be one, or be divided against one another, except by denying their life, and proving faithless to their Head.

It was the last commandment of our dear Lord, that *new* commandment (for the world had never known it) which he gave, not with his tongue, but by dying, that we should love one another, and not with a polite love or a love of smiles, but *as he loved us* that we also should love one another. And this, which is the life of faith and the sum of the commandments, and which is greater than faith or hope, — inasmuch as they shall change, but this shall not, no, not for ever, — he made the mark by which we should be known to be his disciples.

The prayer and effort of Christ, for which he died, and for which indeed he descended, was, that, giving up one body on the cross, he might have another body made up of many individuals, whose life should be the Holy Spirit, in which he should be glorified, and should spiritually fully come in the world; and this by means of unity, and by directing the forces of many to one end, — the full recovery of the descendants of Adam. Do we lend ourselves to that effort, and fall with love into that firm and undivided unity?

There is but one Church, and that is the body of Christ. There are many congregations. There are many tongues and kindreds, many castes and schools. But the power of Christ is in this made known, that these are made one by a deeper unity than all differences; that they are bound together in him,

and, however they be separated in worldly condition, yet, as worshippers and laborers after salvation, are connected with an intimacy of union which is beyond power of speech, a love like that with which Jesus Christ loved us and loved the Father.

I, a humble disciple of the same, can no longer hold my peace, when I look upon your divisions. I would speak in meekness and in modesty, and beg to be forgiven if I trespass; but I speak as a voice from the midst of the wounded body, — I am a groan from Him who is pierced and broken.

How is it that ye denounce one another, and actually hate and devour one another, and smother your unlove in the tones of an affected charity, or separate from one another at all? This, and this only, can be your answer, dearest brethren, in separating from any, — that they are not in Christ; for, if they be in Christ, and you separate yourselves from them, then you tear that sacred body in the unity of which alone the world is to be conquered. For not by any thing less than the fellowship of his disciples, transfiguring and bringing to his service the highest fruits of wisdom, and contributing many talents and many strengths, can he meet and defy the power of a world-wisdom and the might of wickedness, and in his true energy enter in. If ye love not one another, then are ye not his disciples; and if ye discern not him in his disciples, but drive them out of the Church because of your blindness, when he knows them to be his own, then do ye exile yourselves from Christ, and, by setting a bar between yourselves and your brethren, set up a bar between yourselves and him. If we commune not one with another in the Holy Spirit, then his spirit is not with us.

You, professing to be his, are not one in your Head. You separate yourselves one from another; and one, professing to see the truth more perfectly, says to another, "Because ye are not the eye, ye are therefore not of the body"; and another, professing to do more perfectly, says, "Because ye are not the hand, ye are not of the body"; and they that are rejected and excluded look with contempt on those who exclude, and say,

"We have no need of you." But they have need of them. They have need of them that exclude them; and they that exclude them have need of them; and because they are not *one* with one another, they are not one with their Master. By your divisions ye grieve the Holy Spirit away; and the word is not with power among you, because it is not with love.

To that extreme has this gone among you, that a Christian coming to you can find no place of rest; he can nowhere find the Church of his Master, but always some dissevered limb; nowhere can he enter into that glorious fellowship where all distinctions are unknown, and where the weak are received and not to doubtful disputations. He asks for the Church, and he finds a sect.

But by this splitting of Christ's body we not only destroy its unity, but we destroy its life. It lives only in love. Without love it dies. By faith, indeed, it sees; but love is the inward life, of which faith is only an intelligible rising; love, love is its vital fluid, and when that ceases to flow, Christ ceases to live in the world.

By that destroying of the Church, the redemption of Christ is destroyed, and miracle, and bloody sweat, and crucifixion, and resurrection have been in vain. They were all to the establishment of that which we destroy; and by our faithlessness they are made of none effect.

I look round for that fair body and find only the wounded limbs, and every limb is for ever bleeding afresh, and, while it is dying daily for want of connection with the trunk, is perpetually separating itself from it by schism and uncharitableness.

The idea of unity, which is but the intellectual form of love, seems quite to have died out, and fellow-Christians here live on, not only separated one from another, but unconscious that separation is not their glory; and so-called Congregationalism, which was an emancipation from outward hierarchy, has become a dissolution of mutual dependencies.

And is it for this that the Spirit has distributed gifts so copiously among you; making "some prophets; and some, interpreters; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting

of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"? Is it thus that we are coming to "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"? And is it thus that we "*grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love*"?

In this noble figure of St. Paul's, which was nothing accidental, but to which he continually recurs, there are, as the theologian Calvin has well remarked, three things, namely: that all members draw their life from the Head; and that the life of each is finite, needing the help of the rest; and again, that each, being bound up in the whole to that end, should be ready to minister to the rest in charity.

In this part of Christ's Church neither of these three seems accepted. That all life is from Christ is not accepted; for men think first to live of themselves, and then to grace their lives with Christ, — which is impossible, since Christ never graces another, but appears always as himself.

But it is to the other parts that I am now moved to beg you for Christ's sake to listen, which I thus state and offer to you to consider:

That all are members of one body, and that no member can live in health except in connection not only with the head, but also with all the rest of the members, — that each needs the assistance of every other, and should be prepared to minister to every other in love.

And that you may be the more ready to receive this, I will show you, God helping me, how you neither of you (*Trinitarians* and *Unitarians*, as you have most widely divided yourselves) exhaust truth, but are both chargeable with grave errors and deficiencies, which have been only aggravated by your separation.

You, Trinitarians, have been guilty of that with which you

charge your adversaries, of elevating the conclusions of your philosophy into the place of Christian doctrine. You assert the Trinity as an essential and fundamental article of your faith; but *what* Trinity do you find taught in the Bible? *What* Trinity can you allege to be necessary to salvation? Are you so bold as to say the Trinity of the theologians has that place? Can it be pretended that the dogmatic form of the conclusions from the teachings of Scripture concerning God is a vital part of faith? This is the Trinity of Scripture, — that we are saved by God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit.* The religious man discerns that these are all wholly and equally divine; he finds God in Christ, as fully as in heaven; he finds the Holy Spirit nothing restricted or inferior, but the active, gracious God himself. This is the economical or practical Trinity, the Trinity so far as it concerns our salvation. But who will pretend, that, to experience the saving power of Christ, it is necessary to speculate on that in the divine nature which renders this possible, and have the dialectic skill which is necessary to form a dogmatic statement, or the submissiveness to assume and profess one formed by another? That God is three, and cannot in the nature of things be more than three, and at the same time is one, may be true; but what place has it in Christian experience? Whether one speculate rightly or wrongly in this respect, or whether he speculate at all, of what consequence in regard to his union with Christ and fellowship with those that love him? He knows the Father; he prays to him. He knows the Son; he is saved by him; he is formed on him; the Son's life continues to flow and build up a new monument of its power in him. The Holy Spirit is no name, but his one comfort and sustaining

* I beg here not to be understood as setting words together in a manner to defy attack. I wish to indicate the truth, but not a dogmatical fixed form for it. I will quote from a man very high in the Church. "According to *John* and *Paul* alike," says he, "the essence of Christian theism is the adoration of God as Father, through the Son, in the divine living communion which the Son established, or the communion of the Holy Spirit; and this is the root" (is it not also the essence?) "of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity."

thought, indeed the Comforter, to him the life of the world, as all must confess it to be the life of the Church. How, then, will you intrude upon his attention the statements, the uncertain, cloudy, inadequate statements of the understanding, to intervene between him and the light? O, the petty effort! O, the blind and monstrously conceited officiousness! What is your Trinity to me, dear friends? Can it console my sorrows? Can it, when the world deserts or tempts me, sustain my fainting strength? If I reject it, does the Comforter therefore leave me? Ah, no! The Paraclete is more merciful than my brethren, who have need of mercy; does not make his help dependent on my rightness of opinion, but only on the condition of my will, and, while I remain vitally connected with Christ, my Head, I share in the life of the heart.

Again. Have you not exceeded the measure of wisdom in giving to hell a place in your religion beyond the example of Christ and the Apostles? Have not the weak among you corrupted the Gospel, by helping out their deficiency of power with this easily excited, and often worse than unprofitable, fear? Is it strange that men have been tempted to compare the preaching of your pulpits with the preaching of John the Baptist and Christ, which was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and consider how the Gospel would have been changed, if it had run, "Repent, for judgment is nigh and hell is open to receive you"? Let it not be denied that the fear of the future judgment is a very salutary terror to shake the stony heart in pieces; but who will call it the great motive of the Gospel, or what discerning man maintain that it should be the prominent point of persuasion in the Church?

Again. Your doctrine of human nature may be granted to be a powerful expression of a very deep and momentous truth, without which the relations of heaven and earth cannot be rightly discerned. But, in practice, you have distorted that truth, and made it frightful. You hold up before men a Gorgon-head. You thunder forth man's depravity and helplessness, without holding always in close connection with that the ever-ready, never-failing, all-sufficient grace which corrects, supplies, and

abundantly enables. And by making (what you have no authority for) that grace dependent on a specified process of regeneration, which you describe according to that type in which you have yourselves received it, you narrow the infinity of God, and cloud the universality and mysteriousness of his operations.* Where do the Apostles describe the process of regeneration? Where is it said whether the new birth is sudden and late, or may be gradual and early? Where is it said that the final converting operation of the Spirit finds nothing in the soul with which it can coalesce and mingle itself, and, by a gradual transfiguring of all the natural affections and processes, make the divine appear a growth and fruit of the human? You ought not to cause division by attempting to define what is indefinable, to expound what is inscrutable, or think that you can understand others' experience, when you must know that you are incapable of comprehending your own. Do any of you imagine that you have exhausted Christianity? Will any of you set forth your "church" as a realization, even in the way of principle and doctrine, of the idea of Christianity? Have we reached the end of the matter, and does your statement embrace in itself the whole glory of Christ? Or are you not rather a part, — a member of the body, needing the communion with the other members, that your partialness may be corrected, that your wisdom may be enlarged, by the interpretation which others, on their part, have attempted of their experience? And will you not see, that, though there are many operations, there is the same Spirit, and that it is the office, not of a part, but of the

* Seizing with a true religious discernment on the supernaturalness of Christianity, and of the grace of God, which works through it, you have fallen into the error of Marcion, — although you have not, like him, founded an open heresy, but rather chosen to exclude others, — of dividing the God of nature from the God of grace, and shutting out of view the unity of all his operations and covenants. It is true that nature, without God, tends to sin and ruin, and could not, could not rise; but it is also true that our nature is not made to live without God, that it is prepared for him, that the deficiency and inability exist only that they may be supplied and changed to ability, that the divine *supplement* to nature in the soul is as constant and regular as nature itself.

whole Church, to make the greatness of Christian truth known ? Whence derived you the power to judge and to divide ? Whence your authority to reject and to exclude ? Have you an Apostolic succession ? Are there those among you in whom the power of the keys resides ? Or is your spiritual state so perfect that an unerring judgment may be presumed to go along with it ? Is your communion angelic ? Is yours a society of saints ?

If you are conscious of a mixture of the spirit of this world, the nature of which is to cloud the religious discernment, then look round upon your brethren with self-distrust, and not with a disposition to condemn and exclude.

There is a part here which receives not your statements of doctrine, but which bears evident marks of a living faith, partakes of the sacraments, prays to the same God through the same Redeemer, is given to works of charity. Here, then, is a member of the body of Christ ; and who is so bold as to draw the knife of bigotry and sever it from the trunk ? Who will thus mar the fair body in which Christ still lives in the world ? Vain to say that the member is diseased and threatens the rest. Disease cannot progress while the member is in the body of Christ. In that body is a power of everlasting life. The sicknesses, the weaknesses of any member are to be overcome by new pulsations from the central heart ; and all the members are to rejoice in the life which they help to lend. And if the limb be severed, what then ? So far as in you lies, you kill it ; and the body itself, impaired in beauty and wounded in the spirit of its central life, must go halting on, incompetent to the works of God to which the Spirit calls it, and exists thenceforth only itself as a *part*, and is therefore necessarily given over to imperfection, and error, and suffering. O Christians ! that I could speak to you here the word of truth, as it came to me in the secrecy of my retirement ! I will demand of you, with Paul, "Is Christ divided ?" Was *Calvin* crucified for you, or were ye baptized in the name of *Jonathan Edwards ?* You lacerate and mar the body of Christ, that fair Church, that invisibly organized communion of believers, which is continually attempt-

ing adequately to express itself, and would inspire works and fellowship of love. Christ has not wholly left the world ; he is there in that. And you lacerate him and make him bleed anew. Your sin is a higher, deeper sin than that of them who drove the nails ; for that was a crime of ignorant cruelty, but yours is the guilt of presumption and of pride. They pierced him as a malefactor. But you mutilate him knowing him to be your Lord, and, with a treacherous Judas blow, break, as it were, the very bones, which the Jews left whole.

Will you deny the Christian name to such men as Channing, and the deceased, but never forgotten, Henry Ware ? Were they not Christians, members with you of one body ? To deny them the name of disciple, what is it but to lie against the Holy Ghost ? He came in them, and are you without that discernment which recognizes him ? Woe unto you, if, shut up in the narrow circle of your petty theologic thought, you know not, and so cannot discern, that life of Christ which is not confined by sect, nor dependent on the operations of the understanding ! Woe unto you ! for, after having spent your lives in bickering, and ignorance, and uncharitableness, you will find yourselves shut out of the communion of love.

And you, Unitarians, do you set yourselves up as judges and patterns ? Know that you, too, fail of the truth, and are self-condemned if you demand that the truth should be possessed.

You deny the Trinity. But can you fail to perceive that the intellect of the Church must continue to be active on that mystery of unity, and may without rebuke endeavour, so it be with humility and infinite reverence, to hold embraced in one doctrine the fulness of the Godhead, which, experimentally, the Christian receives in separate parts, tracing them, however, to a centre, and finding in each another shape of the whole ? Shall I resign my belief that the Holy Ghost is God the Sanctifier ? Shall I give up my belief that Jesus Christ is God the Saviour ? Will the place of these beliefs be supplied by that which you give me, " an influence," and a " oneness in love " ?

Is "influence" a substantial thing? and what is the *agent* in this influence? Is "oneness in love" enough to destroy all diversity, to remove all distraction, that my Christian gratitude and my prayer may coalesce? Will "oneness in love" account for the constitutional holiness of Christ, for that inward harmony of his being, that profound sinlessness? May I not go farther, and inquire after the *cause* of that "oneness of heart," — why the separate person had not separate desires? Is it weak in me to be willing to be guided by St. John in those words of his concerning the heavenly origin of Christ's being? Nay, nay, you have exceeded the measure of wisdom. You have formed to yourselves conceptions of the earthly side of Jesus's character, and urged them on the world as the sole truth, and you imagine that through your theory alone Christianity is to put forth its power!

Of Christ, the beauty and the sanctity is not the whole. To know the *sources* of his being, the force that spoke to the world in his humanity, — to recognize *Him that sent him*, *as Him that was in him*, *and he in Him*, — this is higher, the peculiarly religious and mystic effort of the disciple. In his highest character, Christ was not an example, but a force.

You do not believe in the Holy Spirit; and for want of a right reception of that part of Christianity, your theory of human nature is incomplete, and your conception of the soul's relation to God untrue. You say you believe in the *influences* of God. But what mean you by influences? Is influence any thing that intervenes? Is not God himself in the soul, with the soul? Is it any emanation, any thing less than his omnipotence and completeness, that is present with us and allied with us? You say you believe in divine *help*. But what is help, and what is that which is helped? Whence came that first impulse and struggle to which the help was lent? Whence the idea of God, whence the sense of the soul's true relation to good and evil, out of which our interest and religious affection and desire arose? Are not these, too, the work of the Spirit? How thus subsidiary and reparatory? Is not the Spirit the source and cause of all spiritual life? Can man by any possibility begin to live without it?

You have ascribed to the nature of man what is true only of the *regenerate* nature of man. You have alleged as part of our glory what is only drawn through faith from God. The child grown up without renewal, what were he, I pray you to consider, but the sensualist, without any of the remorse by which the sensualist is disturbed? What is innocence in the boy, in the man is it not guilt? For does not the law of our being change when we become mature and free? Is not that "beauty of innocence," as it were, a foreshadow of a higher beauty? but out of a shadow there cannot arise the reality. The child is a creature of instinct, and therefore, it is true, faultless in its sphere. But for man other ends are appointed, and, in order that he may fulfil them, there must come, as supplementary to nature, the power of grace, which works from above, with a force eternal and boundless, and forms a new nature wholly diverse from the first. Where are those among you who rightly and adequately discern this and preach it? There are few or none. It is not a part of your religious theory. You have overlooked (but indeed, indeed, you have yourselves often experienced it) that *enabling of the Spirit* without which man cannot make himself acceptable to God.

Again, you have, contrary to the simplicity of the Gospel, revived in a manner that *aristocracy of culture* which Christ destroyed, and repay the spirit of exclusion with the spirit of contempt, *which is only a more profound exclusion.* You set up standards of understanding and of refinement which are beyond the reach of the humble, and pride yourselves on your conformity to them. You are too apt to look down on the rude. The tone of your teachings is academic. A timorous elegance has taken the place of zeal.

But can you imagine, or dream, brethren, that that which you have realized is the strength and the power of the Gospel? Can you imagine that your conception of the faith is to be set up as the adequate interpretation of the mystery that is in Christ? Must we henceforth restrain our speculations, and do violence to our minds, when they tend to contemplate the obscure relations of divine and human things, and bring our reli-

gious natures into subjection, that we may not break over the bounds of so perfect a system, nor trespass on the ground which the wise give over to enthusiasts and fanatics? Have our saints gone so far beyond the saints of "superstitious" days as to prove their light to be a light from heaven? How is it possible that you can imagine the wisdom of this age capable of fathoming the mysteries of the religious life? — or capable of comprehending or of stating the spiritually discerned relations of human and divine things, — of measuring or of describing the glory of Christ? But you continue to theorize, to analyze and define and dissect the shadow; to cure the skin into all sorts of parchment and of leather, while the heart beats and beats, unsuspected, with an eternal, incomprehensible inward life. If your explanations did not fall infinitely short of your experiences, it were indeed pitiable. But the Spirit works with a wisdom deeper than your own.

Yes, the Spirit works and produces fruit which the very trunk that bears it does not know; and, among the rest, bears modesty and true humility, that you will not boast yourselves of what you are, but own your imperfections. You, dearest brethren, are not among those who consider themselves to have attained. You are ready to lament insensibility and to confess worldliness. What remains is to perceive how these acknowledged faults spread their cloud over the truth, and prevent, inasmuch as the truth is discerned by experience and not by understanding, an adequate, doctrinal analysis, and how they perpetually threaten to infuse an evil element into the current of your charity.

I would only beg that your intellectual may not be greater than your moral pride; and that you will not be offended, when the great deficiencies of your religious system are pointed out. Be willing, without anger and without contempt, to hear it said that many of your doctrines are weak and shallow; that your view of Christ is exceedingly inadequate (as, indeed, in greater or less degree, all must be); that your theory of human nature falls far short of the fact; and that your view of that awful and glorious doctrine of the Holy Spirit is very partial and wavering.

Imperfect, then, inadequate, erroneous, as are your conceptions of the truth, how can you erect yourselves into a sect, and claim to yourselves the sole possession of pure Christianity? How can you stigmatize as superstitious that which goes beyond you, or as fanaticism a more fervent form? How can you cherish a separation which was in the beginning forced upon you, and, although it was made wider by the intensity of your protest, is continually abridged as you descend deeper into that religious consciousness on which Christian fellowship is founded? Of those who at the beginning drove you from them, many do now regret it; and still more, having consciously or unconsciously received from you larger views, which are the root of a more liberal sympathy, are prepared to join with you in a surer and sincerer union. Your part in the office of reconciliation is more difficult than theirs; it is seeing the partialness and inadequacy of your doctrine, and laying aside the *spirit of caste*, and condescending to be instructed by the ignorant, and being rather humbled than made proud by your share of the wisdom and riches of the world.

And now, again, I ask your attention, brethren of the anti-Unitarian party. Some among you are inclined to receive the Unitarians into the bosom of the Congregational body on the ground of common explanations. But where is our authority for demanding any assent to any explanations, that we may receive our brethren to full sympathy and communion of Christian life? Not on common understanding, but on common *interest*, is Christian communion founded. And in order to Christian union, no concealment or withholding of opinions is necessary;—but, on the contrary, when opinion is acknowledged to be that subordinate thing which it is, shall we first become truly unfettered in our expression of it, because we shall not fear awakening jealousy or hate; and then shall we approximate to one another, not by mutual concessions, but by unexpectedly meeting one another by virtue of a heartier and friendlier exposition of the extremes of our different theologies. All this speech of mutual concession or of explana-

tion does fall infinitely short of the true principle of union, — nay, does even bear witness to that false and wicked state into which the Church has fallen. It shows that our brethren still deem theology the Christian bond! They do not discern that the life of Christ in the soul lies deeper than all theology. One writer thinks that in the atonement we can be one by acknowledging the death of Christ to be "in some sense necessary." Another writer rightly alleges that there is on this point a fundamental difference. But what then? Do I not belong to Christ until I *understand* his relation to the universe? Is it not enough that I have experienced his relation to me? Is my brother not a member of the body through which I draw my life, because he deems the sufferings of my Lord judicial, while another deems them effectually substitutive, and I, on the other hand, am satisfied with knowing that they have been to me converting, and that by that death I live? No, nothing of this, but *the life of Christ in the soul*, is the bond and principle of common life; and they that deny communion, a communion far deeper than any outward form of expression, with any member of Christ's body, *prove themselves not to belong to it*, or to have so feeble a current of its life, that, far from being regarded as the judges and rightful excluders of their brethren, they stand rather before God as dead, cumbersome members, shameful sores that must by all means be healed or cut away.

No doctrine can be necessary, except that which is a necessary consequence of an experience of the power of Christ. And even that which is the necessary consequence of that inward experience need not have arisen in the understanding in distinct dogmatical form. The test should be applied in Christian charity, and considerateness, and openness, by that religious sensibility which detects in another the mystery which it has itself known. And even this test every true disciple will be very meek in applying to the exclusion of another; for he will feel that the life in him is too feeble to give him confidence in his discernment. The positive he will perceive

and accept. But the negative he will rather leave to a greater judge.

Will you, my brethren, show me where you have received your authority in Christ's Church to eject the ignorant or the mistaken ? The Romanists, when they excommunicate, are at least consistent, for they believe in a transmitted authority residing in them from the Apostles. But you do not claim infallibility ; do not presume that you are either officially or innerly appointed to rule in the Church. We are, whatever may be our theory of exclusion or acceptance, members of one communion with all who share in the life of the Spirit in Christ. We cannot deny the communion to any who share in that life, without excluding *ourselves* from that communion ; for that communion ceases to be itself, when it ceases to be universal. The act of exclusion and denunciation not only impairs the completeness, disables the body by loss of some necessary limb (for no member, however humble, is not *necessary*), but corrupts its own life by the introduction of that false spirit. See, in sad verification of this truth, the sickly atmosphere and dark sectarian imprisonment of those parties among us who are most fond of denouncing.

There is only one man whom we should presume to exclude from the Church, and that is the reprobate. No error, however great, can justify excommunication, so long as Christ lives in the soul ; for that life has power surely to overcome and outroot all error. Error must decrease, but Christ must increase, in every mind. Ask you whether no mixture of worldly philosophy, however dangerous, should justify us ? No, none, so long as the wisdom of Christ is paramount. If a pretended wisdom of the world have the *deepest seat* in any soul, it is evident that the life of Christ is not there. But how slow should we be in judging that that false wisdom has obtained the deepest seat !

The cause which we argue does not go at all to deny the propriety or impair the freedom of associating ourselves and regulating ministerial intimacies by similarity of principles in applying and teaching, so long as these are held subordinate to a higher union, so long as no one circle arrogates to itself

the name of the Church of Christ. There is but one Church. There cannot be such a thing as a particular Church. Congregations there are, but not Churches. From the Church none can be excluded but the unbeliever and the reprobate. And he only is an unbeliever who has not a vital sense of Christ, and he only a reprobate whom Christ has abandoned.

Now, if these things are plain, brethren, why should we not, Unitarians and Trinitarians, wise and simple, philosopher and reformer, join together, casting down every partition-wall, and so, in the unity of the faith, grow up *into him* in all things, who is the Head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the Spirit's effectual working, edifieth itself in love? Else, if the idea of Christ be not realized within the Church, how can it be effectual without it? And that great task which our Master laid on us, to be the organs of his salvation, and to permit him to exhibit himself in us anew to the world, as it were newly incorporate, and through us to exercise his transforming and overcoming power, remains unaccomplished. By division in the army, the battle is lost. Is this, or was that of Judas, the greater treachery?

One thing only. If we are satisfied with the force of Christ now in the world, and find that for him a sufficient kingdom, — if the Christ-tinctured society of our city is the realization of that prophecy of the leaven, and the lump is now pervaded, so that only here and there individuals need conform to the mass in order that the monarchy may be universal, — then the peculiar office of the Church, as an organization distinct from the kingdom of heaven, has ceased, and there is no place for that solicitude I am the organ of.

But that any one should imagine this is one of the saddest signs. Who, that has ever had a dream of Christ's true Church, can think that this community is it, or can ever by its law become it? Because the odor of the frankincense is perceived abroad, shall we therefore not enter the temple? Nay, the intellectual and moral power of society, the dignity and wisdom of its theories, is a reason, not for merging the Church at all in it, but for displaying new measures of the energies of

Christianity to appropriate these elements and transfigure them into heavenliness and perfection, — a reason for making known a new measure of the inexhaustible sovereignty of the Son of the Highest, to render these greatnesses truly great by bringing them to humble themselves before what is greater than they. The imperfectly wise have undertaken to dissect humanity and display its secrets, and even to find God there ; the wisdom of God must anew teach men what they are, and who the Father is, that they may anew be overcome by the foolishness of the Gospel.

Twofold seems to me among us the task of the present generation of Christian teachers ; first, to persuade men that there is a life of Christ in the soul wholly distinct from the life of the world, which, flowing into many spirits, makes them the true Church ; of which the Lord's Supper, as a living sacrament, is the beautiful seal, the vehicle as well as sign of the efficiency of God in Christ, whereby our everlasting life is sustained ; and, secondly, to bring back a reverence for those sacred products of the Holy Spirit in the early age, the Scriptures of the New Testament, wherein the power of God is seen mysteriously working in the limitings of finite understandings, and according to the unchanged individuality of several appointed men, and through these humanities working an expression and record of Christ that unspeakably transcends all attainments of the intellect, and all power of the intellect to fathom. Reverence for these great books has retired only for a time, that it might return and establish itself on surer foundations for ever. The voices of the angels will be again heard ; the names of St. John and St. Paul will sound sweetly once more, — the doctrine of the one, and the inner oracles of the other, to the seeker for true wisdom, be again the Word of God. Blessed is the generation or the man that learns what unfathomable mines are there, and what a fountain ! hidden, indeed, still from men, and unused but by one in a thousand. After the discoveries of criticism, the new reverence for the Bible will teach one thing, and that namely which has been my theme, — how much deeper the truth that is in Christ lies than the errors and limitings of the understanding ; and what

diversity of interpretation the same spirit allows, while it maintains unity of faith.

But some may object that they see not what "the Church" and what "Christian union" is; having been accustomed to regard it, perhaps, as nothing more than the community of all high spirits, a fancied corporateness of the best ingredients of the intellectual world, or, it may be, that very Christianized society with which I have just contrasted it, or that ancient establishment for the promulgation of the faith in an infidel world which, now that its ends are accomplished, has melted away. Indeed, when you speak of *the Church*, you do not command the sympathies of this community. They do not believe in the Church. Such is the effect of schism. It therefore becomes us to understand what we believe, and to be ready to define and establish our doctrine when we put it forward.

The Church is the body of true believers in Christ. And the nature of true belief may be best seen in that confession of Peter in which the Church originated. The faith of the disciples arose gradually, and was subject to many corrections and to many trials before it became genuine and immovable. At last, after all the necessary preparation and discipline, in that hour of retired converse, when many had "gone back and walked no more with Jesus," and he turned towards the twelve, saying, "Will ye also go away?"—it broke forth in that confession of Peter:—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and "Thou hast the words of eternal life." And since this was the true and immovable conviction, which, seeing him as he was, could not be changed by farther light, and, choosing him in an adverse hour, could not be shaken by circumstance, Christ answered, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for *flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee*"; and "I say unto thee, thou art Peter, and *on this rock I will build my Church*." Now, there are other kinds of faith in Christ; but the faith which makes a man a member of his Church seems to be that of which we have here the type,—faith in him *as the Christ*, in whom the ideal of humanity is fulfilled; *as the Son of God*, in whom the divinity is with us, *as the Redeemer* that hath the words of eternal life. Believed in in

this way, Christ must evidently not merely temper and color, but determine and controllingly direct, the character and plan of life. And this effect; therefore, as far as it is apparent, is the true test of membership. And the main decisions and tendencies of life *are always apparent.* There is also one natural outward seal to which every one who truly receives Christ, in that fellowship of the spirit which is the fellowship of the saints, will incline ; and that is the *Lord's Supper.*

The test of true faith is, not that it be perfect in operation, but that it in principle be complete ; that it connect us with one that is perfect. It is not a building on foundations, but a laying of foundations. Perhaps in a mind still corrupt, still wild with unruly passion ; which, however, it commands and awes, and makes itself obvious as the controlling force of the character, by determining the main decisions and the current of the life. The force which faith communicates lies not in the vagueness of sentiment, but in the emphasis of the will.

Thus plainly a certain part of mankind is distinguished from the rest. And the individuals who constitute that part do not stand isolated ; but are drawn to one another by a vehement tendency, and understand one another, and are in heart very near one another. Is it not that same *life of Christ*, which in the soul is self-consecration, and in the communion of souls is love ? Not arbitrarily, but necessarily, it takes that form ; one who is in Christ cannot but love, for Christ is love, and faith without love is not faith. Prejudices may intervene, and false judgments obscure our view ; but love ever strives against all hindrances, and with a certain sacred impetuosity breaks through bars and gates, and storms the strongholds where our brethren lie concealed from us, and will not be denied entrance to any thing which belongs to Christ's kingdom.

How can the union be other than very strong, inasmuch as the ground of union is very deep ? But that union, if you may call it so, which exists " among all good men," and is founded on similar sentiments of admiration, gratitude, respect, or whatever other passive feeling towards Christ, must it not evidently be a very feeble and vague one ; inasmuch as these sentiments are not controlling ? *That* " union " no wonder

the men of the world consider unsubstantial. What does it effect? What strong passion does not destroy it? Admit that it has a being; but its efficacy, its efficacy, — I pray you show us that. Where are its bounds? Do they not melt away, and seem to hold the whole world in its vague mist? Is it not weak in proportion as it is wide? It is, then, neither a body nor a power. It is only a dream, *a shadow* of the approaching Church, a sound of music as the grand procession marches in. True, we are told that no one can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit. But to say that Jesus is the Lord is saying much; for only he who is divinely perfect, and who "hath the words of eternal life," can be unchangeably our Lord.

But all who say in heart that Jesus is the Lord, the anointed Head and Governor of the kingdom of God in the world, can do so only by that discernment which is the fruit of the Spirit; and they are united together by having together become subjects of that kingdom, and being filled with the same principle of the everlasting life. Christ lives in the souls of those who believe in him, in each according to the peculiarity of each, and working to a result which at the same time that it is the glory of the individual is the good of the whole; each by him is enabled to a peculiar service, and exists as an active necessary part of the organic whole, inferior in no degree to any other, inasmuch as it partakes of the common life; and inasmuch as no one member can claim any life as inherent in itself, but only as in connection with the Head, and shared with the other members, there is no room for pride, however eminent and directory may be the office given it to perform. The eye cannot boast itself in its seeing, nor say to the feet, "We have no need of you"; but each glories in the success of all the rest, and feels that its own capacity is wisely limited, and that what in meekness is left unattempted by one is performed by another, and thus, through the manifoldness of "the gift of Christ," by much imperfection the perfect result obtained. Hence great tranquillity, and moderation, and deference, in every member of the true body of Christ; hence that willing preferring of one another; a satisfaction which is the opposite of

jealousy in another's glory ; and a glad performance of offices which seem low to some, but to us cannot seem so, since they are a part of the service of Christ.

In answer to the pleadings for union that have preceded, you will say, perhaps, that "the truth, the truth, must be maintained ; and that, if any reject or corrupt it, and threaten to introduce fatal error into the body, they cannot be retained in communion." To this I do not reply, as has been replied, that the truth is to be valued chiefly that it may produce love ; for *the truth*, not only for ourselves but for future generations, I recognize as the great possession of the world, that for which Christ came into the world, and that for which the Church subsists. But *what* truth ? Something deeper than dogmas. Something which is involved in a true communion with Christ. And we read, not only "speaking the truth," but speaking it "*in love*" ; and "till we all come *in the unity of the faith*" ; by which is meant, surely, not an intellectual, but a *living* faith, as is farther explained, "*and in the knowledge of the Son of God*" ; that is, not a theoretic or doctrinal knowledge, — not a knowledge of him as related to the rest of the universe, but as related to us, — a knowledge of him as the Son of God, that "hath life in himself," and on whom whosoever believeth "hath everlasting life," — a knowledge of him as the "foundation," and "the door," and "the shepherd," and as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," — and not, surely, as the second person in the Trinity, — not, surely, as part of a dead dogmatic scheme. It cannot be, therefore, that a zeal for the truth requires schism in the Church, inasmuch as Christ is truth, and as many as have him living in them hold the truth. But they, on the contrary, that drive out such as he receives into the fellowship of his life, make manifest that they are not of him, and that they have not that living knowledge of the truth whereby they that are one in him perceive in one another the mark with which the Spirit has marked them.

Are you tempted to refer to the anathema bestowed by Paul on those who teach "another gospel" ? Remember wherein that "other gospel" consisted ; in rejecting Christ as

the Saviour through faith, and this "*lest they should suffer persecution* for the cross of Christ"; and the theoretic mistake was *adding to* the Gospel a doctrine of circumcision. (Gal. i. 8, iv. 17, v. 6, vi. 12, 13, and 17.) Who are they on whom the Apostle pronounces his anathema? They who "*love not the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (1 Cor. xvi. 22.) Who are they whom he commands the brethren to "avoid"? Such as "cause divisions," "serving not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly." (Rom. xvi. 17.) Again, men who take advantage of the charity of Christians to nourish themselves in disorder and sloth. Yet even such are not to be "counted enemies," but *admonished as brethren.* (2 Thess. iii. 6, 11, 12, 15.) Again, they are such as are "proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness," — such as "consent not to *the doctrine according to godliness.*" (1 Tim. vi. 3, 4, 5.) And it is highly important to distinguish "the doctrine according to godliness" from the doctrine according to the dogmatic understanding. And, again, they are such reprobates as are described in the third chapter of the Second Epistle to Timothy. Is there any authority here for separating ourselves from those who, while they differ from us in doctrine, are with us *in Christ?* If such authority were exercised by the Apostles, it becomes us to consider that we are not apostles, but poor sinful followers of them, and that we shall have trouble enough getting in at the narrow gate ourselves, without hindering ourselves with pushing out others.

Beloved brethren in Christ, I have, out of an inward impulse which I could not control, spoken these things in the simplicity of a heart that feels them, and with the solemnity of one who hears them from Heaven. They are to me momentous; because they are to me the Truth, and therefore the voice of Heaven addressed to us; and I offer them to you, and beseech you in the name of Christ to consider them, — remaining myself, in the dear bonds of the Gospel,

Yours.